REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN THE NOVELS OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to

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by

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Certificate

I hereby declare that the short synopsis "Representation of Trauma in the Novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature under Department of English, FMeH of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad during the academic year 2020-21.

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ABSTRACT

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian born writer, is undoubtedly one of the most widely acclaimed African writer of the twenty-first century. The saga of her literary works covers a wide range of contemporary issues. Her prolific writing and fictional creativity unfold essence of life in turbulent times.

As a modern contemporary writer blessed with discerning ability to comprehend the daily lives of ordinary people vividly through her fiction she has presented their issues on international level. The novels of Adichie represents trauma through the lives of characters, settings and narratives. Trauma is an emotional response to an unpleasant event which damages a person psychologically. An encounter to such an event makes an imprint on their mind which withholds them from moving forward. Every person is unique in its existence and hence perceive trauma differently. Adichie has skillfully depicted it in her novels.

The debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* presents trauma arising from domestic violence inflicted on its characters. The domestic setting of this story presents the microcosm of trauma generated at the national level due to an ongoing war.

The second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents an interplay of gender dynamics and trauma. The plot revolves around evolving women characters and breaks the traditional notion that women are supposed to be confined only to domestic realm. In her third novel, *Americanah*, she talks about the trauma generated out of identity consciousness. The protagonist in this novel faced discrimination and consequentially was ostracized in foreign land.

As a strong feminist, Adichie through her characters has addressed the issue of gender disparities in the postcolonial world. Her fictional stories are set in the times of political war and horrifying violence which depicts the traumatic suffering of characters.

The purpose of this research is to explore the traumatic representation in her novels through narrative, plot and language style.

Key words: Trauma, Gender dynamics, Adichie, feminist, Postcolonial, Black, Diasporic writer

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INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a black diasporic feminist postcolonial Nigerian writer, famously acclaimed as the 21st century daughter of Chinua Achebe. She is celebrated for her thoughtful perspective on fiction, TEDx talk, essays and outspoken intellect. She is considered a path bearer for the diasporic Nigerian writers who are breaking shackles and bringing the deserved identity to their motherland. Through her writing, she depicts the problems of modern generation and the complexities they face in their ordinary lives.

Throwing light on her childhood and early life, embracing life on September 15, 1977, in Enugu. Adichie was the second youngest child of her parents, James Nwoye and Grace Ifeoma Adichie. Her parents were well educated. Adichie's father was a professor of statistics and her mother was the first female registrar. They both worked at the University of Nigeria. She recently lost both her parents.

As a laudable student throughout her academic life, Adichie has bagged many prizes and various scholarship. She attained her secondary education from the University governed school and followed it for a year and more she started her early academic journey at the University of Nigeria. She opted to study medicine and pharmacy. It was an essential phase for Adichie in the development of her career. She explored many different domains. She exposed herself to editing. Her first project was the university magazine 'Compass' which sharpened her writing skills and made her realize her true calling for writing. Soon at the age of 19, she relocated to Drexel University, Philadelphia, to study communications and political science. She later shifted her studies to Eastern Connecticut State University, where she graduated with her bachelor's degree *summa cum laude* in 2001.

All this time, she made an essential article contribution to the University journal, 'Campus Lantern'. Thereafter, she added another feather to her cap by earning a Master's degree from John Hopkins University in 2003. She was awarded a Hodder fellowship at Princeton University and succeedingly bagged an M.A. degree from Yale University in African Studies. She presented her thesis entitled, 'The Myth of "Culture": Sketching the History of Igbo Women in Precolonial and Colonial Nigeria'. In 2008 she was awarded MacArthur Fellowship and in 2011, she was honoured with a fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. She received

her first Honorary doctorate from Eastern Connecticut State University in May 2015. Later Johns Hopkins University, the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University and many other prestigious institutes awarded her honorary doctorate for priceless contribution to literature.

The saga of her literary accomplishments and nominations is magnanimous. She is one of the best debutant novelists, second to Achebe. She achieved numerous literary awards ranging from the 2004 Hurston Wright Legacy Award, the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' Best First Book Prize, the 2006 Orange Prize for Fiction, the 2009 International Nonino Prize, and the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award, the 2018 PEN Pinter Prize and many more.

The foundation of Adichie's career was led by writing short stories. Her enhanced skills contributed to the literature with widely read books acclaimed her international and national recognition. Her writing became the voice of many subalterns. The plethora of her works contributes to different genres of literary writing, novels, plays, short stories, poetry collections, essays for journals and magazines. The stepping stone in her career was publishing stories in globally-read journals like *Granta* and the *New Yorker*. The esteemed newspaper such as the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post* published her work. However, her writing covers a wide array of themes extending from the Biafran war to the modern-day Nigerian and Igbo diaspora in the foreign land of America.

Adichie debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* was a classic which heighted her literary success. The novel was awarded Hurston Wright Legacy Award for Best Debut Fiction and Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. It made its mark for the Orange Prize for Fiction and was listed for the precious Booker Prize.

The plot of *Purple Hibiscus* revolves around an Igbo family of Enugu, a city in postcolonial Nigeria. The story revolves around the political turmoil background of the late twentieth century. The protagonist is a teenage girl, Kambili Achike, who narrates the story. As the plot unfolds, women characters grow, explore and search for their true identities. This novel presents the life of postcolonial Nigerian women, who are subjugated under the oppression of society. Adichie's strong sense of character evolution highlights the response of the modern generation to the preconceived traditional notions.

The young girl lives with her family. Her father, Eugene, is a political rights activist, a strict authoritarian man, and a staunch catholic in his ideologies. Kambili, through her narration, presents a contrasting model of ideologies in his father's authoritarian attitude against the liberal thinking of their aunty, Ifeoma. Kambili and her brother discover life and love at their aunt's house. The practice of a happy liberal atmosphere encouraged their inquisitive self to express and form their own opinions. Unable to cope with the imposed violence, his wife, Beatrice, poisoned him and their son, Jaja, took the blame for murder on himself. The continuous violence inflicted on her psyche and body of Beatrice destroyed her psychologically and physiologically. The traumatic effects were so long-lasting that even years after the death of Eugene, she could not cope with life. The death of their father opened doors of freedom for the family members.

In this novel, Adichie unveils the trauma depicted in the behavior of the characters. This novel accentuates the concept of collective and individual trauma by drawing a parallel between colonial rule and domestic abuse. Eugene's use of physical violence on the domestic front generated permanent traumatic effects of fear and unwanted submission to authority in the minds of other family members. Through this novel, Adichie has gracefully presented the trauma generated form domestic abuse as the microcosm of traumatic abuse inflicted by colonizers on the state.

Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* fictionally recreates Biafra's passionate struggle to establish itself as an independent republic. The novel revolves against the backdrop of before and during the politically turbulent times followed by horrifying traumatic violence of war. Through her captivating writing style, Adichie successfully depict the effects of war on the relationship of characters' lives. The pain, trauma and sufferings imposed on characters evokes empathy in readers and shed light on the transient nature of human relationships. It is a novel of moral responsibilities, colonialism, ethnic loyalties, class and race. Adichie has uniquely crafted all her characters in this novel. The novel starts and end with Ugwu, a teenage help boy for university professor, Odenigbo. The enigmatic women character of twin sisters named Olanna and Kainene reverse the gender roles in the times of atrocities. Through her characters, Adichie has attempted to define the meaning of womanhood for the contemporary Nigerian woman. Women and children are regarded as the weaker section of society and their plights are often ignored.

Olanna and Kainene went through many traumatic events but their lion-hearted spirit never surrendered itself to the unjustified expectation of the society. Adichie gracefully depicted the

issues of race, gender, class, cruelties of war intermingled with the ordinary lives of people depicting long-lasting trauma in their daily lives. Kainene risked her life and crosses the border in order to arrange some needed relief, on the other hand, Olanna took the responsibility to protect her family. Adichie has gracefully depicted that in the turbulent times of war, even then ordinary lives of people still advance. They love, procreate and adjust themselves to unfortunate traumatic events.

The third fictional novel under this study is *Americanah,* published in the year 2013. The story revolves around a Nigerian woman Ifemelu and her racial experiences which she underwent in the other land, America. In *Americanah,* Adichie has captured the complexities of trauma emerging from identity crisis through the narrative of migrant living in a foreign land. The story revolves around Ifemelu and her friend Obinze, both belonged to Nigeria. They left their country to find some peace in another country but were unaware of the challenges which completely shuffled their lives. Ifemelu was unable to secure a good job for herself, faced sexual harassment and felt like a misfit in new land which traumatized her to the extent that she became depressed, and her behaviour changed drastically. Adichie has skillfully depicted the essence of cultural consciousness and race through the characters. After spending thirteen years living in America, where she established herself as a successful lifestyle blogger of race and consciousness. She decides to return to her native land. The story unfolds for Obinze disclosing his desire to join his beloved, Ifemelu, but with post-9/11 event door to American land was closed for him and he lived a dangerous speculative life as an immigrant in London. This novel depicts their reunion and love for their own country.

In this process of narrating the story, Adichie nonchalantly highlighted the issues of identity, the idea of what it means to be a person of colour in the foreign land of America. It is a novel retelling the African diaspora experiences which plays the role of social commentary on gender and racial discrimination encountered by the migrants in the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore different aspects of trauma in the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie following Literature review was undertaken.

Gayathri S., "Expatriate Experiences and Cultural Trauma: A Theoretical Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah" (2018)

The writer of this paper describes the difference between cultural collective trauma and individual trauma. Cultural collective trauma focuses on psychological damage which takes place at the community level. It is an injury in the social fabric of the community as a consequence of some horrendous event thus leading to the loss of identity of an entire group. Cultural trauma is one major factor that defines the personality and psyche of an individual belonging to one particular community.

Zahoor Asma, "War Trauma And The Dynamics Of Closure: A Hysterical Memory Of Battling Through Embers In Adichie's Half of A Yellow Sun" (2018)

Asma Zahoor in this paper calls for attention to the physical and mental consequences of the war, left behind on the people. The horrifying nightmares are the gruesome legacy of any war. Further, the author explains the psychological disruption and social indifference that develops during the war and how people use it to satisfy their communal anger. Not only the ongoing war causes distress, but its horrible aftermath resulted in the study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Makosso Dorien Alphonse, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of A Yellow Sun: A Transmitted Trauma" (2020)

This paper is a critical study of the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* where the author highlights that the traumas are transferable over generations. The study explores that the *Half a Yellow Sun* is a transgenerational trauma which was experienced by her parents and grandparents. It explains the mechanisms of transmission of trauma. Further, the study explains how literature is a medium used by young generation writers to vent out preconceived trauma.

Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika, Osigwe Nneka Anastasia and Bridget Ngozi Madu, "The Trauma of Exile and Migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah" (2020)

The authors in this paper examined African-diasporic experiences and analyze them through the critical lens of reader response theory. They examined the interplay of socio-economic, political and religious forces which create excessive havoc in the native land forcing people to take refuge in another land where they face the psychological trauma of exile. The present study explores racism and disassociation faced by diasporic characters in the novel.

Azuike Maureen Amaka, "Women's Struggles and Independence in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun" (2009)

This paper highlights the plight of women in a patriarchal society. The violence, marginalization and abuse faced by women in different aspects of their lives traumatized them physically and psychologically. The writer has critically analyzed the trauma in the fictional characters of Adichie, who survived the sexual assault, war, brutality, domestic violence and subjugation from men yet find their voices in the times of atrocities.

Dr. Kerketta & Vineeta Dipti Ritika "Exploring the Role of Violence in Patriarchy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus" (2021)

This critical paper presents the role of domestic violence which serves as the main source of trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*. Further, the study explores the reason for women's subjugation to violence. The traditional gender roles force women to be excluded from the central sphere thus leading them to have an identity crisis which ultimately results in psychological trauma. The interplay of patriarchy and domestic abuse damages the psyche of other to the extent where it seems justified by both oppressors and oppressed.

Nwanyanwu Uka Augustine & Anasiudu Okwudiri, "Trauma Of A Nation And The Narrative Of Suffering In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half Of A Yellow Sun" (2019)

The writers in this paper attempts to analyze Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun* as historical trauma. This historical fiction novel narrative showcases the psychological and physiological destruction in the lives of the Igbo community. The study further presents different ways through which characters have encountered trauma. The trauma of war was horrifying to the extent that the human

psyche found it difficult to reconcile. It traumatized the people who experienced it and the generations who heard its tale.

Craps Stef and Buelens Gert, "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels" (2008)

This study presents the emerging voices in the field of postcolonial trauma studies which exposes its shortcomings and shows its commitment to Eurocentric narratives. The study analyses that the founding text in the field of trauma studies have marginalized non-western traumatic event and histories. Further, it highlights the need to take into consideration traumatic experiences in postcolonial settings and cultural differences in the treatment of trauma.

Balaev Michelle, "Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory" (2014)

This book is a collection of essays which covers a wide range of theoretical approaches to provide an understanding of trauma. These essays take trauma studies in completely new directions by providing profound analysis of trauma in various literary text. This book provides a diversifying contemporary meaning to the critical discourse of trauma theory.

DESCRIPTION OF BROAD AREA

This research aims to interpret and analyze the representation of trauma in the works of Adichie. In her fictional works, Adichie has represented dimensions of trauma through different characters. The novels are set in a politically turmoil background. Adichie in her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* throws light on the plight of Nigerian women and the amount of trauma and suffering they endure. The marginalization of women's voices in the complex dynamics of society, religion and patriarchy made them victims of domestic violence. Trauma is not only a one-time event but has long-lasting effects on the psyche of an individual. People who encounter traumatic event in their life suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. The novel shows the contrast between the rigid cultural ideologies which need an evolvement with the contemporary times.

Adichie has used fiction as a medium to explore and express the pain, suffering and traumas created due to wars and passed through the generations in her community to the younger generations. She has recreated the Biafra-Nigerian civil war in her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The amount of turbulence and turmoil that war brought in the ordinary lives of people provides enlightenment to the readers and the magnitude of destruction wars brings along with them. Adichie created an archetype of strong female characters in all her fictional works that are analyzed in this study. Adichie understands the rigid notions present in her community. Through the medium of the hedonistic female characters, she tried to define the contemporary definition of Nigerian women.

The third novel in this study is *Americanah* in which Adichie has explored the theme of identity consciousness. This novel is a social commentary on two different nations. As the story has been presented through her narrative she has presented a commentary on how dislocation from native land hampers the psyche of an individual. Humans are social animals and the trauma of separation from one's belonging to a community is huge. The interplay of racism and gender affects the diasporic natives. The protagonist of the novel went through the trauma of exile and after years of suffering, she established herself in foreign land, yet she craved belongingness which made her come back to her own native land. Adichie has explored reasons which evoke trauma and how different human beings deal with them. Some people surrender to deep dark pit of trauma and yet some come out as the best versions of their own selves in the times of atrocities. Mostly people succumb to silence and fails to give a voice to their experiences and their behaviors are changed.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study and understand traumatic representation in the novels of the writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.
2. To understand trauma in relation to gender dynamics and identity consciousness.
3. To explore writer's novels which depict different dimensions of trauma through characters, narratives and plot styles.
4. To explore representation of acceptance and reconciliation of trauma in the novel.
5. To analyze language used in order to represent trauma in the works of the writer.

METHODOLOGY TO BE ADOPTED

The proposed research is a qualitative research which is exploratory in its nature. In order to provide analysis primary and secondary sources that includes but not limited to the scope of books, journals, interviews and internet sources will be employed. On the basis of observations, and the critical interpretations of the three works current research goals shall be fulfilled:

1. The research will comprise detailed biographical study of the writer, social cultural aspects of the modern society and textual analysis of the works executed in a comprehensive way to provide in depth analysis.
2. Trauma theory will be used as a critical lens to provide analysis. Therefore, psychological books on trauma theory depicting the impact and implications of post-colonial traumatic representation will be studied for better understanding and comprehension of the text.
3. The fictional works contains characters created by author, in order to get a better understanding of textual characters an autobiographical and biographical study will be conducted to substantiate the research.
4. The study of community belief, social and cultural milieu and diasporic indulgences of African-American natives will be explored to fulfil the objective of understanding traumatic representation in her fictional works through narrative, plot and language style.

EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH

1. An expected outcome of this research is critical analysis of the representation of different dimensions of trauma in the novels of Adichie through interpretation of character, plot and narrative styles.
2. Establishment of relationship between gender dynamic, female sensibilities and effects of trauma.
3. An understanding of different aspects of socio-cultural consciousness and diasporic divulgences with postcolonial trauma.
4. Identification of language used to represent trauma and traumatic effects in the novels of the writer.

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by Alisha Arora

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